Basing a Hiring Decision Solely on Price

One of the most common mistakes when outsourcing a call center is choosing a provider based solely on price. Of course, you want to save money, but remember the old adage that says, “you get what you pay for”? A bottom-dollar call center will provide bottom-dollar service. This will damage your reputation with customers and lead to reduced customer satisfaction.

While you certainly want to save some money, you cannot let that drive the decision-making process. Price will be important, but it should not be the sole consideration when choosing an outsource call center provider. Set a budget and then stay within it, making sure you are not paying too much but also not paying too little either.

Other factors to consider during the vetting and hiring process include:

- The type and level of technology used in the call center
- How effectively call center staff are trained
- The level of communication you can expect from the center
- If coverage is provided for a single communication channel—phone only, for instance—or multiple channels
- Does the coverage include all the services your business needs from a call center?

Failing to Call References

References are crucial. As you shop around for a call center provider, you should have access to a list of references from each firm. These references should consist primarily of other clients. It is essential that you do the legwork necessary and get in touch with those clients, as you can learn a great deal about what to expect from the provider.

Previous clients can offer information about quite a few things including: hidden fees, the level of security you can expect from the call center, common problems experienced with the call center’s staff interaction with customers and everything in between. If you do not call references, you’re missing one of the easiest, most reliable ways to vet potential partners.

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Lack of Communication

With any call center provider, communication is vital. If you do not communicate effectively—both pre-relationship and during your relationship—there is simply no way you’ll see the full spectrum of benefits. In fact, you will likely encounter serious challenges that reduce the value provided by the call center.

Before signing a contract with a call center provider, you must communicate about a wide range of factors. Some important information to request includes:

- Call statistics and goals, both reached and unreached.
- An overview of their training program for the center’s staff.
- Staff turnover statistics for the previous five years. Call center turnover is generally high, but this information will help you look for trends that will make or break your hiring decision.

Ask about the center’s culture and employee engagement level too, since happy employees make for happy customers. If a call center’s environment is negative, then staffers will be unhappy. That will carry over to all communication with your own customers and does not create a positive outcome or a positive customer experience.

Of course, it is also critical that you communicate effectively with the call center provider during the relationship and avoid only calling when there’s a problem that needs to be addressed. Ideally, you will regularly communicate with your provider about progress towards desired outcomes or goals, challenges they are experiencing and other factors.

Outsourcing Your Problems

Outsourcing should be a means to reach a goal for your business. In this case, it should be to provide your customers with a positive overall experience, with the call center being one important part of the entire experience. You should not be outsourcing your headaches and hassles. If you’re outsourcing because it’s easier to hand your problems off to someone else than to address them in-house, there is something broken in your process.

Ultimately, outsourcing your problems will lead to a strained or even failed relationship with the call center. If you are struggling with challenges related to customer service, don’t expect a call center to solve those for you. It’s far better to delve into the situation in-house, determine the cause and take corrective action on your own than risk a failed relationship with a call center due to issues outside their control.

As a note, if you’re currently working with a call center and the relationship is strained, discover the reason. If you decide to end that relationship and find another call center and you take no action to address the underlying damaged process, the next relationship will fail as well.

Over-Outsourcing

Outsourcing your needs to a call center can provide invaluable benefits. It can enhance your customers’ experience, leading to better customer retention and higher profitability, while reducing wait times. However, there’s no need to outsource everything. Avoid going on a binge here. Just because something can be outsourced, it doesn’t mean that it should be outsourced.

Take a long, hard look at the tasks and processes you’re considering sending to another provider. Is there value to outsourcing them beyond the assumed cost benefits of paying someone less in the long run? Will it free up time for your staff to focus on more important goals or to alleviate their fatigue? Will it help provide a coherent strategy or ensure greater expertise is brought to bear? If not, then you probably shouldn’t outsource it.
Micromanaging

If there’s one thing that decision makers and executives seem to forget during the outsourcing process, it is that the call center is not your company. You cannot micromanage the relationship and expect it to thrive or even to survive. The outsourced company has its own rules and processes, its own decision makers and culture.

Yes, you do need to be active in the relationship—too little involvement will ultimately kill your partnership. However, you cannot manage the other company and yours as well. Set clear goals and communicate effectively and then let the call center staff do what they do best. If you’re struggling with the urge to control every facet of how the call center operates, you will destroy the very efficiencies you hope to benefit from.

Lack of Training

You expect to hire a call center provider with professionally trained staff members. However, that does not mean that they automatically understand exactly how you want processes to flow. You need to be willing to provide training, particularly early in the relationship. Think about the process involved with hiring a new in-house employee—the time and effort it takes to bring them up to speed on what you do and how you do it. The same care needs to be taken when outsourcing.

Of course, training needs to be provided for your in-house staff as well, particularly when it comes to interacting with call center staff. It is important that your in-house staff understands how the outsourced tasks will support them in their own duties, how those tasks will help the company reach its stated goals and more. Also, make it clear that the call center is there to provide support, but will not be a cure-all for everything that ails your business or even everything that affects your customers’ experience.

Assume Your Costs Will Drop Dramatically

Outsourcing is supposed to provide some financial relief, and it will. However, don’t automatically assume that you’re going to save a lot of money. Yes, you will see a marked drop in costs during peak hours and after-hours support, but you must still be committed to making an investment.

Think of it this way—if you’re unwilling to invest in a call center, it really means that you’re unwilling to invest in ensuring a positive experience for your customers. Saving money is undoubtedly important for your business, but without customers, there’s no profit to save. The happier your customers are with their overall experience, the more loyal they will be and the more you can expect to realize from that relationship over a longer period of time.

The Wrong Focus

Sure, you need to focus on process, at least to some extent. That is particularly true for in-house initiatives. However, when working with an outsource partner, you need to focus more on outcomes. You need to set clear goals, and then measure progress towards those goals, rather than focusing on how those goals are being reached. This ties into micromanaging—as long as your stated goals are being met (or exceeded), then let the call center worry about the “how” of it all.

It’s also important that your goals are clear and measurable. Achieving “better customer service” is not an achievable goal—what does “better” mean to you? Your provider should be judged on their ability to deliver progress.
and create a plan. Know when a call should be transferred from the call center to in-house staff.

In addition, it is essential that you plan not just for today, but for tomorrow and for a year from tomorrow. You need to build a plan that will support your customers as the business grows and requirements change—scalability and fluidity are crucial. Of course, you'll need a solution for interaction, management and change notification between your company and the outsourced provider to ensure that your customers' experience remains positive as needs change. A single point of contact in the form of a relationship manager or management team can ensure this happens (as long as the team itself is trained properly, of course).

**Not Planning for the Customer Experience**

Ultimately, outsourcing your call center needs must uphold a positive overall customer experience. That is the true goal here. You must have a clear plan for your customers’ experience and know how outsourcing fits into that plan. Outline each potential customer communication scenario toward your goals within a specified timeframe, not on the process used to reach those milestones (unless milestones are not reached, of course).

**CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, outsourcing call center needs can provide your business with significant savings and greater efficiencies, so long as you avoid making these mistakes. The right call center provider, ample training, a solid commitment to ongoing communication and the right focus will help ensure a successful relationship with few or no pitfalls and a smaller learning curve. However, giving into the urge to micromanage, shopping by price alone and a failure to train and communicate will virtually guarantee that you'll struggle during the relationship and most likely fail to deliver a positive experience to your customers.

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